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ABSTRACT

A small town can strengthen its local economy as a result of business people and concerned citizens collectively identifying that community's uniqueness and then capitalizing on it via advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, or publicity. This publication relates the science of marketing to communities. Seven simple techniques are provided to help residents of a small town identify and market what is unique about their community, i.e., brainstorming session, visitor questionnaire, photography contest, interviewing new businesses, focus groups, school essay contest, and professional visitation. A case study of Willcox, Arizona, is included along with a sample visitor registry form. (AH)

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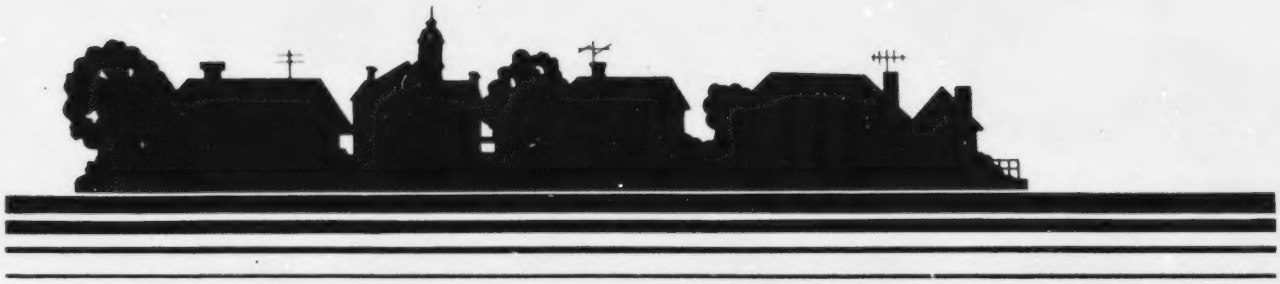

SMALL TOWN STRATEGY

Marketing the Uniqueness of Small Towns

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In recent decades, the rural-urban migration trend has reversed. People are moving back to small communities in increasing numbers. Likewise, nonmetropolitan communities are attracting an increasing percentage of new industrial plant locations. Some small communities have capitalized on this national trend; others have not.

This publication relates the science of marketing to communities. A small town can strengthen its local economy as a result of business people and concerned citizens collectively identifying that community's special uniqueness and then capitalizing on it. Seven simple techniques are provided in this publication to help residents of a small town identify and market what is unique about their community. A case example is included.

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Marketing a Community

Marketing is a new but rapidly growing field. As recently as the 1950s, there was no established definition for marketing, though many managers were beginning to see the importance of what advocates of this new field were teaching. Large companies began to restructure their organizational charts to include marketing divisions. Over the past 20 years, the field of marketing has developed rapidly to become one of the most important areas of modern business activity.

More recently, creative managers have begun to apply modern marketing techniques to the nonprofit sector. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as "the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer." Hospital directors, museum managers, political campaign managers, and college presidents are all beginning to realize that they are in the marketing business. Hospital directors market health care; museum managers market historical education and nostalgia; political campaign managers market their candidates; college presidents market education.

Community leaders must recognize that they, too, are engaged in a marketing enterprise—that of marketing their towns to prospective "customers" who could make use of what the town, its people, and its businesses have to offer.

The Differential Advantage

Potential customers often are faced with a wide range of alternative products, all very similar to each other. It is the marketer's job to create in the customer's mind an idea that a particular product is different in an important way, so that the product will have a competitive edge over others in the marketplace. This uniqueness or competitive edge is what is known in the marketing field as a *differential advantage*.

In the context of community development, it is the job of the community leaders to persuade potential tourists, residents, and outside businesses that your town is unique—or has a differential advantage— in a way that could be important to them in their decision of where to visit or where to locate. This creation of a differential advantage could turn out to be the deciding factor for a family considering where to spend their next vacation. It could influence a family who is thinking of moving to another community, or it could steer a business to locate in your town over other towns which don't appear to have anything unique to offer. In cases where other towns offer similar features, if your community leaders have created a differential advantage in the potential customer's mind, your town is more likely to win out.

A marketing strategy is designed to create and nurture a differential advantage. "The Four P's" of the marketing mix—product, place, price, and promotion—form the center of marketing strategy.

In marketing a town, the various features of the town itself become the *product*. The concept of the town as a product encompasses the town's scenery, natural resources, friendly atmosphere, transportation routes, history, architecture, educational facilities, shopping areas, and much more. All of these aspects help to determine the individual character of a given town. Often, some of these features will be unique to that town alone but they can sometimes characterize an area of the country as well. For towns in the southwestern United States, an advantage often cited is the excellent climate. This feature helps to make towns in the Southwest different from those in other parts of the country.

Place refers to the physical channel— for example, a grocery store or a lumber company— through which a product is sold. For some marketers, selection of the outlet through which the product will be sold can have a major impact upon the ultimate success or failure of the product in the marketplace.

When we speak of *price* as an element of a community's marketing mix, we are referring to costs that the community imposes upon residents, tourists, and resident businesses for the privilege of carrying out activities in the town— cost of living, taxes, transportation costs, value of real estate, etc. Often, small towns have distinct price advantages over other locations. These price advantages can become an integral part of a town's marketable uniqueness.

Finally, differential advantages of product and price must be promoted effectively. Essentially, *promotion* is communication. Community leaders must communicate the message of their town's uniqueness to prospective customers. Reaching the right audience is often the most difficult task, because promotion costs money and most small towns are constrained by a tight promotional budget. But a low-cost promotion program can be effective if it is well-conceived.

In review, community leaders are engaged in marketing a complex product—their town. Principles of marketing tell us that community marketers should develop and nurture a differential advantage for their product, based on the uniqueness of the product itself and the price of the product. This differential advantage must then be promoted to a target audience within applicable budget constraints. Though the steps in developing and carrying out a marketing plan can be time-consuming, they can pay off in the form of a broadened economic base for your community.

Identifying Your Town's Differential Advantage

Your town's competitive edge is a composite of all the factors that make the town unique. Too often, towns try to be successful by copying marketing strategies that have worked for others, only to find that the program they borrowed doesn't work as well as they thought it would.

Each town is unique, and what works for one town will not necessarily work for another. As a basis for your town's marketing program, community leaders must identify and capitalize upon the town's special uniqueness. That uniqueness may be the presence of a valuable natural resource such as rich farmland or thermo-wells, or the community may have a strategic location in serving a given population, or it may have scenic beauty, or historical significance, or a famous native son, or pleasant climate, or pleasing architecture, or a combination of these and other aesthetic values.

Often, those who live and work in the community lose sight of their community's uniqueness or they take it for granted.

To bring your town's uniqueness into focus, solicit ideas from many different sources— residents, newcomers, visitors, and others. Each group can offer a different perspective, and each different perspective can contribute in building your town's differential advantage.

Too often, community leaders assume that they already know what is unique and marketable about their town. They don't take the time to test out these assumptions with their town's customers, and when they do, it is done in a very unscientific manner. (*"A couple from Michigan stopped in here last month and they said . . ."*)

Many of us overlook the fact that the overall uniqueness of a community is usually the result of a combination of elements rather than one or two big things.

In identifying your community's uniqueness, be specific and be realistic. Vague generalities and intangible adjectives are of limited value. Remember, uniqueness lies in the eye of the beholder. What is beautiful to one person may be boring and unexciting to another.

The following techniques are designed to help communities gain important insights in the development of a town's competitve edge. Any of these exercises will help you develop a solid marketing program for your town. Naturally, the more of these projects your town can do, the more it will be able to sharpen its competitive edge. If you have questions or if you need assistance regarding these techniques, your county Extension office can put you in touch with a community development specialist in your state. (Another WRDC publication, entitled "Coping with Growth: Community Needs Assessment Techniques," might also be of interest to you.)

Brainstorming Session

The most basic method of zeroing in on your town's differential advantage is a brainstorming session involving people who know your community. The session can be held at any convenient time and location. It will be more beneficial if you choose a cross section of the community so that different viewpoints can be brought into the discussion. It is equally important that there be a group facilitator chosen in advance to steer the session when it gets off the track.

The brainstorming session should be designed to find out what the participants feel is unique about your town. Plan to have the session take at least an hour. (These sessions tend to run more smoothly when refreshments are provided.) Appoint someone to record the ideas as they are presented on large sheets of newsprint or a blackboard. Then review these ideas after the session is over to decide which are the most promising. Be sure to thank all participants.

The facilitator's first responsibility is the orientation of the brainstorming group. After everyone has been introduced and refreshments have been served, the facilitator should explain that the group is gathered to brainstorm about the uniqueness of the town. Explain that the group's ideas will be used in the development of a marketing package. The assignment to the group might be: In your opinion, what makes this community unique? What do you particularly like about this community? Keep the brainstorming going by asking questions such as: What else is special about this community?

Brainstorming rules are fairly simple:

- List every idea mentioned.
- Do not discuss ideas.
- Do not judge ideas.
- Do not worry about repetition.
- Do not worry about spelling as ideas are recorded.

These rules must be strictly followed so that no potentially good ideas will be held back by any of the participants. No put-downs or arguments are allowed! The difficulty of the facilitator's job lies not in acquainting participants with these guidelines, but in enforcing them as the exercise continues.

After a list of unique characteristics has been developed, the facilitator may wish to challenge the group to be more specific: What specifically do you mean by "friendly people"? Please explain what you meant by "good climate."

The end result of your brainstorming session should be a usable list of unique, marketable community characteristics. These characteristics, along with other unique aspects of the town uncovered through some combination of the following six techniques, should be stressed in promotions directed to outsiders. If this uniqueness is properly communicated, the town will create for itself a true competitive edge.

Visitor Questionnaire

It is also important and relatively inexpensive to find out what visitors believe is unique about your town. This insight is a valuable aid in the development of the town's competitive edge.

Most towns have a location where visitors can come to ask questions and get information about the area. Usually, this is a visitors' center or chamber of commerce office. Most people who visit these centers are there to gain information for themselves, but smart community leaders can balance this exchange by asking visitors to fill out a brief questionnaire.

First, the questionnaire should find out the visitor's place of residence. Name and address should be optional since this is personal information, but it is important that respondents give their home town and state. With this information, you can pinpoint those areas currently contributing a heavy concentration of visitors to your town. These areas can then become prime targets for promotional activity.

Secondly, the questionnaire should ask the purpose (business or pleasure) and the destination of the visitor's trip. These questions should yield a brief profile of what brings visitors into the community. If a large proportion of the questionnaires show similar responses of one type or another, you can gain insight valuable as you plan your approach for the promotional campaign. For example, if you found that many visitors were passing through your town on the way from New Mexico to California vacation spots, you would select a promotional medium that would reach prospective vacationers from New Mexico, and you would tailor the promotional message to appeal to that audience.

Another question that should be included: What have you particularly noticed that you like about our town? This question will draw a variety of responses. If a pattern develops such as "good road service" or "historical sites" or "that big cactus on the road into town," then you will be armed with a feature of the community that is, in the opinion of outsiders, unique and marketable.

Add more questions if you feel they are necessary, but remember: the more questions on the form, the more likely it is that prospective respondents will leave blanks or refuse to bother with the questionnaire. Keep it short. One side of an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper is least intimidating—to both the respondent and the person analyzing the completed questionnaires. (A sample questionnaire is provided in the case study section at the end of this publication.)

If you don't want to use a questionnaire, a guest registry is a good source of location information. The easiest way to compile location information is with a map and pins. This will give a visual display of the results. Whatever method you use, something along these lines should be instituted. It is a good, inexpensive source of information that will help you plan an effective promotional campaign.

Photography Contest

Photography is an integral part of any good promotional presentation. But good pictures of interesting sights around town can be hard to come by.

Nearly everyone will have a different idea of what particular sight is interesting and unique to a town. Through a well-publicized photography contest, these individual perspectives can be recorded. Some of the pictures could surprise you!

The purpose of such a contest is two-fold. A photography contest can provide a number of quality photographs for use in the town's promotional literature. But just as importantly, it can be an inexpensive way to boost community pride and get residents thinking about their town in a positive way.

Most often, such a photography contest is sponsored by the chamber of commerce, though other groups could undertake it. It is important that one group coordinate the project to avoid wasteful, confusing, and possibly disastrous duplication of efforts. The coordinating body must have an address where entries can be sent, and it must have at least one volunteer or employee who is willing to keep track of entries as they come in.

Rules are specified by the contest coordinators. The contest will run more smoothly if a few simple guidelines are followed:

- Inform contestants that *all entries will become the sole property of the contest coordinators* and might be used in promotional literature or other promotional activities.
- Stipulate in detail how entries must be submitted, and to what address. State whether entries should be color or black/white prints. This will, of course, depend upon whether or not you plan to use color photographs in your brochure. Full-color printing is expensive but often necessary to show off local scenery to its best advantage. (If slide/tape presentations have a place in your marketing scheme, consider a category for color slides as well.) Also outline what size entries must be. A standard size is 8" x 10", and it is helpful and more fair if all prints are the same size. All entries should include a brief description of when and where the photo was taken, in addition to the entrant's name, address, and phone number. Encourage multiple entries.
- Set a beginning date and an ending date for the contest. Give people plenty of time to have film developed and duplicates made, but don't let it drag out for so long that it loses momentum. Six weeks should be a comfortable time limit.
- Inform contestants how their photographs will be judged. Most contests judge entries on technical quality and on subject matter. In this case, the subject should be: "scenes, faces, and activities that are unique to our town."
- Entries should be judged in at least two, preferably three categories. So that amateurs will not be discouraged, amateur entries should be judged separately from entries sent in by professional photographers. In a small town, there may be only a couple of professional entries (consequently all professionals may win a prize). These contributions are worth special consideration because they are often among the best of the contest. Some communities may also want to include a junior category for those 16 years old and under to encourage participation by younger citizens.
- The rules must state that the decision of the judges will be final.

This will avoid unnecessary headaches after the contest is over.

Promotion for the contest should be as wide as possible, at the least possible cost. Here are some suggestions:

- *Newspapers.* Such a contest is newsworthy to local residents. A well-written, concise press release sent to the newspaper's city editor has the best chance of getting printed as a news story (as opposed to a piece of purchased advertising).
- *Radio/TV.* Local stations are often willing to announce such items for no charge— either as news or as a public service message. This is a great way to let people know about the contest.
- *Posters.* Handbill-sized posters can be printed for a nominal charge. Such posters should include contest details and can usually be posted in stores and other conspicuous spots around town.
- *Schools.* If you include a junior division in the contest, speak with local school officials about having the contest announced in the schools.
- *Newspaper advertising.* It may be necessary to run a newspaper ad describing the details of the contest, but this type of advertising is usually expensive.

Judges should be chosen before the contest begins. The basic criteria for selecting judges are impartiality and an understanding of the contest's purpose. Judges and their families may not enter.

Prizes should include recognition and monetary rewards. The following guidelines may be helpful:

- *Recognition.* Plaques should be offered for first, second, and third place in each division. These can be small and relatively inexpensive, but they should have the name and date of the contest inscribed on them. (Note: Winners of the professional division probably would prefer plaques to hang in their places of business.)
- *Credits.* The photographer should be credited for all photos used in promotional material.
- *Monetary rewards* may be found inexpensively. Check with local photo shops to see if they would be willing to donate gift certificates as prizes. Other merchants may also wish to participate. If no donors can be found, remember that U.S. savings bonds can be purchased for less than face value, and they make good, patriotic prizes.

Using the photos. When the contest is over, the sponsoring organization will hopefully have a good selection of usable photographs of unique aspects of the local community. They can be put to use in a number of ways.

- Use the pictures as illustrations in any promotional brochure or printed flyer that is published for distribution to the town's prospective "customers."
- Make a montage of the more interesting photos and display it at the visitors' center, the chamber of commerce, or some other location where visitors and residents will be likely to see them. Photographs are the best way for visitors to become acquainted with the town in a very short time.
- Increase community awareness by using some of the best photos in a supplement to the town newspaper. Papers will sometimes run such a supplement free, in the community interest, but you will probably have to find advertisers to sponsor the insert. Finding sponsors can take some effort, but advertisers are often happy for the good exposure that comes from participating in such a project. Arrangements should be made with the newspaper to print at least 500 or 1,000 additional copies of the supplement.
- Develop a slide presentation from the photographs. Slide shows (with either live or taped narration) can be presented to service clubs and civic organizations to help rekindle interest in the community. If the program is well-received, you might consider showing it in neighboring cities or wherever your customers are coming from.
- Use either a black/white or a color photo for a poster, depending on your budget. A professional-quality poster can provide excellent exposure for your community when displayed in offices, tourist locations, and travel agencies.
- Develop a "town tour" brochure with your black/white photographs. Pictures can be supplemented with explanations and a map showing locations of the various points of interest. A small, single-color brochure is not very expensive to produce, and it can be a big help to visitors in your community.

Interview New Businesses

To promote expansion by attracting new businesses, this exercise is a must. When a new enterprise locates in town, the chamber of commerce or the city/town council should have a member visit the newcomers to welcome them to the community. If your group is not doing this already, you are missing an opportunity to pick up some valuable marketing information, as well as a chance to help the newcomers feel at home. In this initial contact, no effort should be made to solicit membership in civic organizations. This will detract from the interview.

This interview should be designed to gather pertinent information on why the business person moved to your town. The interview should determine:

1) *How* the business person found out about the town; and
2) *Why* they decided to move to town.

If you find through these interviews that certain promotional channels have been effective in bringing in new businesses, then you may want to expand your efforts through these channels. For example, if a business person found out about the community in a newspaper article published in Phoenix, then the town should try even harder to get similar newspaper publicity run in newspapers in other towns, and even rerun in Phoenix. These interviews can uncover marketing strategies that have already been proven to work for your town.

Little preparation is required for these interviews; the interviewer is only interested in the answers to two questions. The first question should be asked after the interviewer has visited

with the newcomer for awhile to break the ice. Before asking any questions, assure the respondent that all information received will be treated confidentially, and that you are merely trying to get a general idea of how to improve the town's marketing strategies. A straightforward "How did you first come to learn about our town?" will do nicely. As the subject stops talking, follow up with some probing questions, like "Had you ever heard about our town anywhere else?" and "Why did you decide to read (listen to, etc.) this particular source?"

When you are satisfied that the first basic question has been answered thoroughly, ask the second question: "What made you decide to move your business here, rather than somewhere else?" This can also be followed up until you are satisfied with the detail of the answer. The entire interview should take only about 15 minutes.

Ideally, the interviews should be tape-recorded and transcribed later. The tape recorder should be introduced casually so that your respondent will not become flustered or apprehensive. Respondents talk much faster than you can probably write. The thoughts you miss while writing may turn out to be important later on, even if they seemed to be trivial during the interview. If the interview cannot be recorded, it is essential to take notes while the subject is talking. Notes will be sketchy at best; details should be fleshed in as soon as possible after the interview, while the information is still fresh in your mind. After a few such interviews, the results should be compared to find similarities. If certain statements show up repeatedly, community leaders will be armed with some valuable information that will help make your town's marketing strategy even more effective.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are basically group discussion sessions run by a trained professional who attempts to "focus" group discussion on a specific topic. For small-town marketers, focus groups can help to bring up and evaluate new ideas about the town through intensive interaction among 8 to 12 individuals. Such sessions could also be used to uncover marketable aspects of the town's uniqueness that may not otherwise surface.

Focus groups can be important because they gather input from townspeople in an environment of free discussion. The flexibility of these groups allows them to probe various subjects as they arise—even subjects that weren't considered important before the discussion started. Because of the interaction of participants, the focus groups uncover more detail than individual interviews do.

The group must be run by someone who has experience with focus group techniques. A discussion run by an untrained moderator will likely be no more than an interesting (or perhaps chaotic) coffee klatch that yields little or no usable information. Likewise, improper makeup of the group (a poor cross section, or one participant who is loud or short-tempered) can drastically affect the results.

The session, which should last about an hour, is tape-recorded and transcribed later. This allows the moderator to reflect on every detail of the group discussion, and it provides the town with a detailed summary of participants' key statements. Participants should be informed that community leaders will only see the transcript, not hear the tape, and that no names will be used. The tape itself will become the property of the moderator, who will be responsible for protecting the anonymity of the participants.

If your town decides that it would like to conduct a focus group, there are two sources to contact for help. You could contact a marketing research firm or an advertising agency that has the expertise to conduct focus groups. (Not all firms can offer this service.) It would be helpful to get a list of references for whom the

company has conducted focus groups, and call these references. Choose a firm only after you establish that they have performed satisfactorily in the past. As a less expensive alternative, you can contact the community development specialists with your Cooperative Extension Service. They will use the resources available to them to help you get your focus group underway. (Also see the list of references at the end of this publication.)

School Essay Contest

Another inexpensive method of uncovering your town's differential advantage is a school essay contest. Such a contest is most easily run where the community has its own school, but with proper coordination it can also be run in a school that serves several different communities.

Contact school officials to determine the feasibility of such a contest. The contest could be announced in English classes as an assignment (optional or otherwise) to write a 200-word essay entitled "What Is Unique about My Town." All age groups should be encouraged to participate.

When the papers are handed in, they should first be graded by the English teachers for style and grammar, then sent to the sponsoring organization for judging. Essays should be divided by grade level and judged on content.

Ideally, winners should be awarded prizes by representatives of the community at an assembly of the student body. Scholarships or savings bonds make excellent prizes, but they should be given in addition to, not instead of, small plaques or trophies.

The essay contest would be healthy competition for the students, and it would help community leaders acquire yet another perspective of what is unique about their town.

Professional Visitation

Those who live in and drive through your town can provide you with some insight into its differential advantage, but a team of visiting professionals can give you information you might not get from any other source.

Your Extension community development specialist is in contact with university and other resources that you might put to work for your town. Through your community development specialist, you might arrange for, say, an urban planner, a geographer, a historian, a marketer, and a business executive to visit your community and report on their observations. The visit is not difficult to arrange. The outsiders can come to town in the morning and can be given a guided tour for orientation purposes. They need to know what you believe is important about your town. The tour can finish with lunch at a local restaurant. At lunch, the visitors will have an opportunity to ask questions and talk with community leaders about the town. After lunch, the professionals should be free to look around on their own to become as familiar as possible with your community. Some of them may wish to arrange special interviews with business representatives, utility managers, city officials, the industrial development authority, or the planning commission for more in-depth questioning in their specialty areas.

The professionals will have been instructed to write summary reports describing what they liked about your community and what they believe to be the marketable uniqueness of your town. They will also be invited to comment on any conditions they feel need improvement. This is all valuable marketing information and it can be obtained for a relatively modest cost. It is a good opportunity for you to get input on what your town is doing right, what it may be doing wrong, and where it could improve.

Promotion

Once your town has identified its differential advantage, you must successfully promote this uniqueness to prospective customers. Community marketers have four distinct areas from which to create a promotional mix. As mentioned earlier in this publication, these elements are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and publicity.

Advertising

Advertising is the promotional medium that communities use most often. It includes paid presentations in brochures, trade publications, magazines and newspapers, billboards, and other advertising media. Information on the community's uniqueness and its potential customers, gained through the techniques outlined in this publication, can help the community fine-tune its advertising to make it more efficient than before.

For example, let's say that a town is trying to attract tourist trade. Its visitor questionnaire has revealed that many of the town's guests are vacationers from large cities in the same state who are en route to a nearby resort area. This would suggest that the town buy ads in advertising media that will be seen by these prospective customers.

There are many advertising alternatives available. Use common sense in deciding how to spend your advertising dollar to communicate your message as efficiently as possible.

Personal Selling

The next element of the promotional mix, personal selling, consists of verbal conversation with prospective customers. Community residents are using personal selling every time they speak with others about their town. It is important for community leaders to realize that employees in contact with the public must conduct themselves as the town's sales representatives—because that is really what they are.

Another type of personal selling happens away from home. For example, if your town were to find that it had the ideal conditions and labor force to support electrical assembly operation, it could seek out a trade association serving this industry. Since most such organizations hold conventions, it might be possible for the town to rent a small booth in a trade mall at the association's next convention. If community sales people were armed with good sales presentations, their personal selling efforts at the convention could pay off.

Likewise, a weekend booth at a shopping center in one of the larger cities in the state may be effective in attracting in-state visitors to your town.

Sales Promotion

The third element of the promotional mix is called sales promotion. It consists of coupons, trading stamps, balloons, bumper stickers, free entertainment, and other promotional items paid for by the marketer. Many towns already use some form of sales promotion, but these promotions are often not well-planned. Many communities hastily jump into a general advertising and promotion campaign before they have identified unique marketable products, and before they have identified their best potential customers.

When deciding to use a sales promotion, ask yourself two questions:

1) Will this promotion reach our prospective customers? and
2) Will this promotion make a lasting impression upon our prospective customers—or will it soon be forgotten?

There is no specific formula for promotional success, but if you screen your activities in this fashion, you will probably eliminate most unwise sales promotions before they become unwise expenditures.

Publicity

Publicity differs from the first three elements of the promotional mix in a very important way—it's free. For small towns with small budgets, publicity can be an effective way to reach prospective customers who could never be reached through paid promotion.

Publicity usually materializes when some event or characteristic of a town becomes "newsworthy" in the eyes of the media—radio, television, magazine, or newspaper. Smart marketers know that many news stories exist only because someone put forth the effort to write a press release. A press release can often tie in with some of the town's other promotional activities. But the story won't be run if nobody writes it!

Familiarize yourself with techniques for writing good, concise press releases. This can greatly increase the chances of your press release resulting in a story on the front page of the newspaper's community section—rather than in the editor's wastebasket.

Make sure your town has a well-managed publicity program to take advantage of this least expensive element of your promotional mix.

Most towns know that promotion is essential for growth to occur. By knowing who your customers are, and by knowing the unique features of your town, you can design a promotional message that can have a far greater impact than one designed on guesswork. By utilizing all four elements of the promotional mix to push your differential advantage, your town will be assured of running the most successful marketing campaign possible.

It Really Works: The Case of Willcox, Arizona

The Willcox Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture knew that they had to take some positive, aggressive steps to stimulate business in the Willcox area. Their final decision turned out to be not only creative, but also successful.

Using a visitor questionnaire similar to the one described in this publication, the Willcox Chamber discovered that many of the tourists visiting and staying in Willcox were from rural areas in the Midwest. Such visitors felt Willcox was unique because it so closely resembled a midwestern farming town, but was located in Arizona's mild climate. According to Chamber manager Ellen Clark, "We found that over half the visitors stopping at the Chamber office for information have a rural farm interest or background. They are the ones the area really seems to appeal to."

In response to this information, the Chamber decided to concentrate its limited tourism budget on promoting Willcox to rural residents of the Midwest. Chamber tourism chairman Dick Seidel proposed a "Spend a Fun 'Farmer's Holiday' in Sunny Arizona" ad that was run in a midwestern farm magazine. The ad was jointly sponsored by the Willcox Chamber of Commerce and the Arizona State Department of Tourism.

To aid the visitors when they arrive, the chamber developed a self-guided tour of area farms and ranches and a brief factsheet on the economics of local agriculture. According to Seidel, "We've decided to target our advertising rather than use the shotgun approach."

To supplement this advertising, the Chamber developed a "Stay a Day in Willcox" packet that tourists can pick up at various locations around town. It is actually a folder with pockets containing single-page descriptions of historical sites and scenic areas, along with good directions to help newcomers visit these areas of interest. The packet also includes biographic sketches on the area's Chiricahua Apaches, Apache Chief Cochise, and Indian agent Tom Jeffords who lived near Willcox in his days of glory. A biographic sketch of favorite son Rex Allen is included, along with directions to the Rex Allen Museum. The packet contains maps of Willcox and the surrounding area, and self-guided tours of the Willcox area that tourists staying in Willcox can complete in one day.

Expensive, you say? The packet is financed entirely by advertising on the folder.

"We have found that the packet is less expensive than a color brochure and is much more effective," explained Chamber manager Clark. "It gives much more information on the area, and individual sheets can be pulled or added in tailoring the packet to the individual tourist's needs. The packet has gotten much greater response than our prior brochure."

By identifying its differential advantage and the needs of its customers, Willcox, Arizona, has now begun to benefit from its marketing efforts. These activities take time, effort, and money, but they can result in better efficiency and a greater economic reward for the entire community.

Welcome to Willcox

Visitor Registry

We are very pleased that you have decided to visit Willcox. We wish to do all we can to make your visit a pleasant one. Please provide us with the following information that we might continue to do a better job at serving our visitors.

1. *Your Name (optional):*.....
2. *Your City and State of Residence:*.....
3. *What made you decide to visit Willcox?*.....
4. *What is the final destination of your trip?*.....
5. *What have you particularly liked about the Willcox area?*.....

   .....
6. *What could we have done to make your stay more pleasant?*.....

   .....

Thank you!

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Prepared by David H. Hogg, formerly of the Department of Marketing, and Douglas Dunn, Extension Rural Development Program, University of Arizona. This publication is part of the Small Town Strategy series produced by the Western Rural Development Center. Other titles in the series include:

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